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Student opinion, with reference to the residence hall counselor's performance, is studied. More specifically, a valid and reliable rating scale for use by students in evaluating their residence hall counselor was developed. In developing an instrument for this purpose, some of the weaknesses of the more common and popular type rating scales such as rater leniency, rater bias, and halo effect were avoided. The forced-choice technique was considered th e best technique in overcoming such weaknesses. (Data analysis showed that an instrument composed of items significantly different in their ability to discriminate between effective and ineffective residence hall counselors, yet prossessing comparable degrees of favorableness, could be constructed from student supplied descriptive behavior statements describing the performance and activities of residence hall counselors.) This instrument had a satisfactory split-half reliability of .74. There was no significant difference in the reliability for men and women. A reliable and valid instrument (forced-choice rating scale), through which student opinion of the residence hall counselor can be successfully measured, has been developed. (Author/PS)

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CONSTRUCTION OF A FORCED-CHOICE RATING SCALE FOR STUDENT EVALUATION OF RESIDENCE HALL COUNSELORS

by

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Introduction

Burgeoning enrollments have made it necessary for colleges and universities to house an increasing number of students in college-owned and operated facilities. This sudden concentration of students has been a potent factor in the changing character of the campus scene. A cursory review of the literature relevant to housing reveals a consensus that residence halls can make a significant contribution to the education of students beyond the mere provision of food and shelter. In fact, residence halls, in their provision of communal living, are now highly committed to the furtherance of higher learning,[1] and increased efforts are being made across the country to align the living unit with the classroom.

A key person in the implementation of an effective housing program is the resident counselor. These are graduate or advanced undergraduate students assigned by

[1] Williamson, E. G., and Wise, Max, "Symposium: Residence Halls in Higher Education and Residence Halls in Higher Learning," Personnel and Guidance Journal 36:392-401, February, 1958.

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the school in recognition of the fact that there is a responsibility not only for class and laboratory instruction, shelter, and food, but for those portions of the lives of the student not otherwise touched upon by the instructional staff but which are nevertheless a vital link to progress in the total academic setting. In other words, the residence hall counselor is particularly responsible for the social-educational aspects of university living in a setting where the student spends as much as 65 per cent of his time.

To place the residence hall counselor in the circle of "academic responsibility,"[2] carries with it certain expectations from which the practitioner cannot escape. This immediately suggests that some means of evaluation of residence hall programs is needed. The evaluation of total program is important, since the success of individual performers within a program is often inferred from the total success of a program. However, our concern here is more specifically with direct evaluation of the individual counselor.

Presently such evaluation as is done is limited primarily to observations by staff and administrative

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[2]Kilbourn, D. W., "The Status and Roles of Head Residents," Personnel and Guidance Journal 39:203-206, November, 1960.

officers responsible for residence hall programs.[3] More specifically these supervisor evaluations are frequently obtained by means of a "free written" supervisor rating. This results in an over-all rating of the counselor which often does not reflect individual or specific areas of strength and/or weakness. There have been some attempts to rate individual counselors in terms of component competencies by means of the composite type scale. This type of scale usually splits the counseling process into subjective and philosophically based units and asks the rater to evaluate the rates on each component unit.

This composite type rating is, however, usually done by a supervisor and lacks some of the reliability and validity desired of performance ratings. Student evaluation, on the other hand, has been virtually unobtained except that which reaches the supervisor by word of mouth. Typically, this type of "evaluation" represents the student "gripe" and may be rather localized in terms of scope, thus not reflecting even an accurate measure of the rating by the individual registering the "gripe" to say nothing about that of other counselees with whom the counselor has contact. Nevertheless, these "gripes" may find their way into the supervisor's rating of the counselor, biasing an over-all rating in one way or another. This is likely to

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[3]Sifferd, C. S., "Evaluating a Residence Hall Counseling Program," School and Society 69:452-454, June 25, 1949.

be the case, since the contact which the supervisor has with the counselor is for the most part more limited and presumably makes the supervisor less able to render a total evaluation than might be the case for the counselee who has constant daily contact with the counselor in relationships that cover all aspects of his job.

Further, the perspective with which the supervisor views the counselor is likely to be quite different from that of the student counselee. Thus, considering that the student is the one being served, it seems only appropriate that he be given an opportunity to render judgment as to the effectiveness with which the counselor carries out his job.

This study was conceived specifically to get at this little sought after area of opinion with reference to the residence hall counselor's performance, since it appears so vital to the success of any residence hall counseling program. As Claude W. Grant has indicated:

> One observation which seems safe to make about any discipline whose major concern is working with people is that the scope of operation of a member of the discipline is probably as dependent upon what people think he can do as upon what he has been trained to do.[4]

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[4]Grant, C. W., "How Students Perceive the Counselor's Role," Personnel and Guidance Journal 32:367, March 1954.

Student evaluation could, of course, be sought by means of the "over-all" or "free written" technique. However, our general knowledge of the student's willingness to devote the time required for this kind of evaluation would lead us to seek other means. Further, since the technique does not focus on specific areas of behavior, its utility as a measure against which to guide improvement is questionable.

In developing an instrument for use by students in evaluating the performance of residence hall counselors, the investigator attempted to avoid some of the weaknesses of the more common and popular type rating scales such as:[5]

1. The common occurrence of "over-rating" by raters.

2. Ratings by some raters which are not comparable to those of others.

3. Over-all generalized ratings which fail to bring out real differences among individuals being rated--halo effect.

4. Ratings which are not consistent and reliable or at least in which inadequate or a complete lack of reporting of reliability is evidenced.

5. Necessity for elaborate training of raters for any reliable ratings to be obtained.

It was primarily to overcome some of these types of

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[5]Richardson, M. W., "Forced-Choice Performance Reports," in Rating Employee and Supervisory Performance.

problems that the forced-choice technique was developed by the Personnel Research Section of the Adjutant General's Office in 1945. Research conducted since its development indicates that this technique comes closer than any method yet devised in overcoming the weaknesses of more conventional rating techniques. Thus, construction of such a scale is pursued here in hopes of the evolution of an empirical tool through which more objective assessment of the relationship between counselor and counselee can be made for the ultimate improvement of residence hall counseling--a vital adjunct of higher learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to construct a forced-choice rating scale through which student evaluation of the performance of residence hall counselors could be measured.

Delimitations

The study was limited to the development of a forced-choice rating scale which could be utilized to measure the opinion of college students with reference to the performance of residence hall counselors. Only undergraduate students living in the halls of residence at Indiana University were used for purposes of this study.

Definition of Terms

Definition of the following terms should facilitate understanding of the procedures used in this study.

Forced-Choice Rating Scale. A forced-choice rating scale is one in which the rater is required to make a series of choices, from groups or blocks of descriptive behavior items, of those items which are most and/or least descriptive of, characteristic of, or applicable to the person being rated. The point here is to force the rater to choose from among descriptive phrases which appear of equal value but which actually differ at a statistically significant level in their power to discriminate between good and poor counselors. Thus, the rater's ability to control the final result of his rating is reduced.

Descriptive Behavior Statements. The descriptive behavior statements are short phrases or sentences which describe qualities of residence hall counselors. These statements were supplied by college students.

Preference Index. The preference index is a measure of the favorability of the descriptive behavior item. The measure of favorableness was determined by averaging scale values for descriptive behavior items after the behavior statements had been judged as to degree of favorableness (on a five point scale ranging from "very favorable" to "very unfavorable") to counselors as a whole.

Discrimination Index. The discrimination index is a measure of how well the descriptive behavior item discriminates between effective (good) and ineffective (poor) counselors. The discrimination index was computed as the difference between the average descriptiveness of an item when used to describe the effective counselor, and when used to describe the ineffective counselor. The descriptiveness ratings were derived from two separate ratings based on a five point scale of descriptiveness.

Triad. A triad refers to the arrangement of the descriptive behavior statements in groups of three. All three have a similar preference index but vary in terms of discrimination index. A sample triad follows:

1-A Speaks Well
1-B Is Very Diligent
1-C Sincere

Significance of the Study

The instrument should have general utility as a measure against which the counselor can judge his level of performance as far as his constituents are concerned and his need for growth and improvement. Further, the supervisor should be able to utilize the results from such a measure in counseling counselors. These two are particularly important when it is recognized that many people involved in residence hall counseling are actually interns in college student personnel work or eventually

end up as practicing student personnel workers. Considering that they will be working with students for some years to come, it seems quite important that they have some measure of student reaction to their ability against which to gauge performance. Likewise, it seems equally important for residence hall administrators to be aware of the standards used by students in evaluating the performance of counselors.

The instrument could also add to the meaning of ratings by supervisors. However, it is not suggested that the instrument developed here be used as a replacement for the latter. On the other hand, this research could easily lead to further research involving the development of similar instruments for use by supervisors or a single instrument for use both by students and supervisors. Another line of research would be development of a similar instrument to use in the recruitment of prospective counselors. A more extended development from such research would be efforts toward construction of an instrument of general utility in the field of college student personnel.

Summary of Procedures and Findings

The following procedures were used to develop the forced-choice rating scale for student evaluation of residence hall counselors.

The investigator first, through careful examination of residence hall counselor job descriptions, isolated categories of job activities. These categories isolated by the investigator were subjected to experts in the field of student personnel administration who judged their appropriateness. On the basis of percentage of agreement among judges, the number of job activity categories was reduced to 10. This was an important initial step, since these categories could then be used to limit the universe of content of the rating scale being developed, thereby helping to insure rating scale validity.

After establishment of job activity categories, 500 undergraduate students, all with two or more years of living experience in residence halls, were solicited, by means of a questionnaire, for both favorable and unfavorable descriptive behavior statements concerning the behavior and activities of residence hall counselors. This inquiry yielded an unedited pool of 5,164 descriptive behavior statements. Editing and elimination of duplicate items reduced the total item pool to 416 statements.

The remaining 416 descriptive behavior statements were submitted to 12 supervisors of residence hall counselors and members of a residence hall counseling staff. These 12 experts judged the relatedness of the 416 statements to the 10 job activity categories previously established. On the basis of 75 per cent agreement among the

judges, the number of descriptive behavior statements was further reduced to 176.

Next, 100 student judges, all with two or more years of living experience in residence halls, rated each of the remaining 176 items on a one-to-five scale of favorability. This was done to establish the preference index of each item. This step was vital, since the final rating scale was to be composed of items with an equal or comparable favorability rating when applied to counselors in general.

Another 100 student judges, again with two or more years of living experience in residence halls, evaluated the 176 items in terms of their applicability to the "best" (most effective) and "worst" (most ineffective) counselor they had known. This rating was done on the basis of a five point scale. The mean rating for the "best" rating and the mean rating for the "worst" rating was subjected to a statistical test of the significance of differences between means in order to determine the discrimination index of each item. Those items significantly discriminating between effective and ineffective counselors at the one per cent level of confidence were retained for inclusion in the final form of the instrument. This process, coupled with the preference index requirement of comparable favorability ratings, resulted in the retention of 96 items for inclusion in the final form of the forced-choice rating scale.

The remaining 96 items were arranged into 32 triads or blocks of three statements each for the final rating instrument. Each triad contained items with equal or comparable preference ratings; however, two of the three statements possessed a high discrimination index while the third statement in the triad had a low discrimination index.

The completed instrument was then printed and administered in a residence center not previously sampled in the construction phases of the study. All 23 counselors in this center distributed a total of 1,112 rating scales and received a return of 619 completed rating forms. A split-half reliability on the odd versus even items using a Spearman-Brown formula resulted in a reliability coefficient of .74. Separate reliability coefficients for men and women were not significantly different from the total test reliability.

A similar administration was conducted by 18 counselors in another residence center among 816 students. From a return of 439 completed rating forms, the split-half reliability coefficient was .70.

The return of 439 forms was combined with the 619 completed forms from the test residence center netting a total of 1,147 individual ratings. On the basis of the results obtained from these ratings, norms were established for the forced-choice rating scale. The mean score for the 1,147 ratings was 30.86 with a standard deviation of 3.32.

Conclusions

This study was conceived to explore the area of student opinion with reference to the residence hall counselor's performance. More specifically, the purpose of the study was the development of a valid and reliable rating scale for use by students in evaluating their residence hall counselor.

In developing an instrument for this purpose, the investigator sought to avoid some of the weaknesses of the more common and popular type rating scales such as rater leniency, rater bias, and halo effect. The forced-choice technique was selected as coming closer than any other technique in overcoming such weaknesses.

Analysis of the data presented revealed that, from student supplied descriptive behavior statements describing residence hall counselor performance and activities, an instrument composed of items significantly different in their ability to discriminate between effective and ineffective residence hall counselors yet possessing comparable degrees of favorableness could be constructed. It was further demonstrated that such an instrument, once constructed, had a satisfactory split-half reliability of .74. At the same time, there was no significant difference in the reliability for men and women.

Thus, the investigator must conclude that a reliable and valid instrument (forced-choice rating scale), through which student opinion of the residence hall counselor can be successfully measured, has been developed.